

Adjustment to University: Investigating the Effect of
Emotional-Cognitive Predictors on Students'
Transition to Higher Education

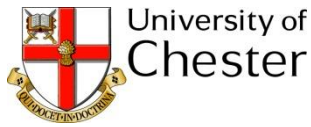
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| Date | Discussion topics |
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| 18/1/2017 | Dissertation proposal and possible research instruments and approaches. Reading recommendations. |
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| 25/1/2017 | Further research on questionnaires to use and focusing the research on students' successful adjustment to university. |
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| 8/2/2017 | Completing decisions on research methods and tools. Completing ethics forms. Reading recommendations. |
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| 22/3/2017 | Finalizing ethics issues and amending research methods to meet Foundation School's requirements. |
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| 31/5/2017 | Collating collected data for analysis and reading recommendations. |
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SIGNED
STUDENT _____ DATE: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Tytherleigh'.

SUPERVISOR _____ DATE: _____

Adjustment to University:
Investigating the Effect of
Emotional-Cognitive Predictors on
Students' Transition to Higher Education

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Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted in relation to any other degree or qualification.

Signed:

Date: 25/09/2017

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1. ABSTRACT

Attending university is acknowledged as a major life transition during which students experience a range of demands and trials, often for the first time and attempting to understand why many fail to thrive is a key area of concern and research. This study used multiple regressions to predict the effect of hope, coping strategies and levels of flourishing on the adjustment to university of 81 first year UK and international students undertaking a variety of courses at the University of Chester's Foundation School. Findings from this study suggest a significant and positive relationship between students' active coping strategies and their overall university adjustment, academic adjustment, social adjustment and personal-emotional adjustment though not to students' attachment to the institution. It was also found that maladaptive coping had a significant negative effect on student adjustment. Hope Agency showed correlations to academic and social adjustment but was subsumed by Coping as a predictor, whilst Hope Pathways and Flourishing showed no significant effect on adjustment.

2. Introduction

2.1 Student adjustment to university

The majority of new university students, including almost all the respondents on this study, are in late adolescence (MacDonald & Leary, 2005) and the vast majority are leaving their home and long established family dynamics to function as independent adults for the first time (Morton, Mergler, & Boman, 2014). Whilst achieving entry into higher education is seen as an important accomplishment that is mostly met with euphoric feelings, the predominant emotion upon arrival at university is one of anxiety rather than joy. For example, in a 2009 study of 2,250 undergraduates, 85% said they experienced stress daily and there has been increasing use of counselling and mental health services amongst first year students, which exemplifies the importance of research into the factors that relate to these issues and what can help alleviate them (Dias & Sá, 2014). The romantic image of university as a respite from real life, where one indulges one's aesthetic pleasures and embarks on an intellectual adventure (Galatzer-Levy, Burton & Bonanno, 2013), has been replaced by recognition that students undergo multiple stressors; including financial responsibilities, employment issues and changes to social support or friendship networks. Students have to develop their psychosocial skills to face many new personal and social challenges associated with their move into higher education (Hirsch & Dubois, 1992), including the reality of increased academic independence and self-reliance (Haynes, Daniels, Stupnisky, Perry, & Hladkyj, 2008; Soledad, Carolina, Adelina, Fernández, & Fernanda, 2012). It is, also, generally accepted that stress reduces well-being (McCrae & Costa, 1986) and that these pressures can have a detrimental effect on the transition to university, adversely

effecting academic performance and motivation (Abdullah, Elias, Uli, & Mahyuddin, 2010; Galatzer-Levy et al., 2013; Haynes et al., 2008; Julal, 2013).

Research has shown that stress amongst new students is commonplace, producing a significant reduction in mental well-being and causing students to seek university health support for psychological distress during their first semester (Dias & Sá, 2014; Morton et al., 2014; Storrie, Ahern, & Tuckett, 2010). For example, in comparison to the general population, Storrie et al. found that student health is poor and their emotional well-being is worse than their physical health: 47% of students had at least one instance of mental health concern, with anxiety over managing their workload and finances becoming the most common problems after 1994. In the UK this focus on finance could be related to the phasing out of grants, replaced by student loans and the rising costs of Higher Education has become a key concern for many students, not least because many now have to work to support themselves whilst studying (Cooke, Bewick, Barkham, Bradley, & Audin, 2006). Disturbingly, the same period saw diagnosed depression double and the rate for suicidal students triple (Storrie et al., 2010), exemplifying the pressing need to promote effective ways to support students with their adjustment, well-being and academic achievements.

These problems help explain why incompleteness rates of around 27% amongst first year students have been repeatedly recorded in U.S. universities (Haynes et al., 2008). Data from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2017) also reveals similar issues, in that the first-year dropout and non-continuation rate for all undergraduate entrants in 2014-15 was 14.9%. Whilst this attrition rate is favourable to those at US colleges (Haynes et al., 2008) or in Spain, where more than 50% fail to complete their course (Soledad et al., 2012), the proportion of full-time first-degree UK students expected to complete their course at the Higher Education provider with which

they started was 80.8% in 2014/15 (HESA, 2017). This does not indicate that all those students failed to complete a degree, as some may have interrupted their studies or changed institutions for a variety of reasons. However, it does show that completion and retention rates are a major issue for UK universities, as they are in all European Union countries (OECD, 2011 in Soledad et al., 2012). These statistics also illustrate the importance of research into student well-being and the exploration of procedures and policies that can help reduce these rates.

Previous studies that focused the importance of academic ability in predicting completion of courses found that it explained less than half the variance in retention rates (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Studies using the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker & Siryk, 1989) have asserted that personal-emotional adjustment played as important a role in successful transition as academic ability: Furthermore, it has been found that there were worse outcomes for students who underestimated their capacity to adapt to the social demands whilst overestimating their academic prowess (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). This strongly suggests that this area of research is key to helping predict and prevent difficulties with adjustment, as they are strongly linked to academic problems and withdrawal (Liu, Kia-Keating & Modir, 2017). This research, therefore, investigated factors that affect students' transition to university and exploratory interventions, using the SACQ developed by Baker and Siryk (1989) to produce a multi-faceted, quantitative assessment of the participants' adjustment to university.

Most UK research into student transition and wellbeing has been qualitative, with a specific focus, and the SACQ has rarely been utilized here or in Europe (Mohamed, 2012, Soledad et al., 2012). However, it has been widely used in North America and Australia and validated in the thirty years since its conception and Credé & Niehorster's

(2012) meta-analysis suggests that it is a very good instrument for predicting university retention rates, therefore suitable for this study. It has also been employed to investigate whether adjustment predicts other important outcomes, especially academic performance (Feldt, Graham, & Dew, 2011; Soledad et al., 2012).

Baker and Siryk (1989) claimed that completing the survey actually serves as a form of intervention and is associated with improved levels of adjustment and higher rates of retention, though they admit a potential bias as originators of the scale. Gerdes & Mallinckrodt (1994) state that results show that testing, identifying and assisting students with their social integration and academic challenges may help improve confidence, retention and success but also state that their study found the SACQ was more accurate as a predictor for students who successfully adjusted, rather than those who dropped out. This suggests that implementing the SACQ as a tool for intervention could result in a large number of students being mistakenly classified as at risk. However, even when taking this into consideration, it does appear that the SACQ is an effective tool which can help in the process of identifying intervention and counselling needs (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt). Therefore, this study used SACQ scores in correlation with other cognitive-emotional measurements to assess possible links and explore their effect on the transition to university, though numerous researchers have used this instrument to research other factors, most commonly when looking at demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity or socio-economic status that may affect adjustment (Credé & Niehorster, 2012).

2.2 Coping Strategies

Previous research into student retention and transitional stress found that good coping practices act as a positive significant predictor of first year students' ability to successfully adjust to the challenges of higher education and feel valued (Abdullah et al., 2010; Julal, 2013). Furthermore, good, problem-focused coping skills are found to have a significant positive impact on academic achievement (Abdullah et al., 2010; Baker & Siryk, 1989; Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000). This may be related to the discovery that incorporating direct action as a response to stressors creates positive emotions, even amongst individuals whose depression scores are significantly higher than is normal (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Conversely, those with poor coping strategies, who suppress or avoid issues, suffer worse outcomes and greater psychological distress. In fact, students who perceive their problems as insurmountable are likely to lapse into helplessness and even depression resulting in a far greater likelihood of failure or withdrawal from their course, whereas, those who can engage thoughts and actions to alleviate their problems are far more able to withstand setbacks and eventually advance (Struthers et al., 2000). Individuals utilizing effective coping appear to gain a two-fold advantage, as they are more likely to address and alleviate issues by tackling and managing stressors before they become more serious and, as a consequence, are less likely to experience serious psychological distress (Julal, 2013). This focus on coping skills may be even more significant for university transition as previous studies have shown that students learn a preferred routine of coping strategies related to their previous academic experiences (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) but these may not be as salient or effective in the more independent and challenging arena of higher education (Struthers et al., 2000).

Active and effective coping strategies are seen to reaffirm an individual's feelings of control, which helps validate values and positive emotions, resulting in a positive reappraisal of the situation (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Therefore, identifying students who cope poorly and offering interventions to improve their coping styles and skills could help ease their transition and experience, leading to better outcomes and clear benefits for both the individual and the institution. There may be issues related to previous experiences, as Julal (2013) suggests that students who previously suffered serious personal problems had often learned to suppress issues or react badly rather than reflect, which made further distress more likely. Nonetheless, identification of issues and at risk individuals can help avoid an escalation of problems, resulting in social and psychological benefits alongside academic improvements (Julal). It does need to be noted that the same coping strategies can have differing effects dependent on the situation and that no coping process is inherently good or bad (Julal). Notwithstanding, it is widely accepted that problem-focused, active coping is seen as far more successful and results in better adjustment, both personally and academically (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Moreover, research suggests that those who employ engaged, problem-focused coping strategies are more adept at addressing difficulties as they arise (Julal, 2013). In their research on first year Australian students' transition to university, Morton et al., (2014) found those who employ these attributes are also more likely to seek help and institutional support specifically designed to manage these types of problem.

Despite this widely acknowledged positive effect of good coping strategies, there is disagreement over whether coping techniques can be taught or if doing so can have any beneficial effect because of the belief that situational coping mechanisms are

intrinsically linked to major personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 1986). For example, optimists will pursue active methods as they expect favorable outcomes whereas pessimists will disengage or dwell on their distress as they foresee failure (Carver et al., 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1986). However Carver et al. (1989) only found modest links casting doubt on these claims, suggesting that coping strategies are not inflexible and unchanging. Individuals may have their own preferred coping strategies but these can be altered, especially as those who use the disengagement tactics linked to high neuroticism recognize that they are ineffective (McCrae & Costa, 1986). Though individuals prefer to use familiar methods they can adapt and alter strategies if these are seen as ineffective or unfeasible and there are also a wide range of coping processes, which could influence outcomes, that were excluded from the measure of coping strategies, such as wishful thinking, blame and social comparison (Carver et al., 1989). It is also believed that there are additional coping methods not captured by the questionnaires and that these are most likely related to positive emotions (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

This belief that individuals can alter their coping strategies led Folkman and Lazarus (1985) to develop their Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ), to examine coping processes that involve a change in response to a variety of stressors rather than a constant trait linked to personality disposition (Folkman et al., 1986). This model creates a distinction between emotion-focused coping designed to minimize emotional distress and problem-focused coping, which involves actions aimed at solving the stressful situation. This adaptable form of process coping is thought to be only likely to occur if a person believes they have some control over outcomes and managing their stressors will change results (Abdullah et al., 2010). If they do not believe their efforts will affect the outcome and they will simply have to endure the stressor they are more

likely to respond with their emotion-focused trait mechanisms (Folkman et al., 1986; Carver et al., 1989). Although both types of response are used when undergoing stressful situations this suggests that individuals with poor coping skills are more likely to respond in an emotion-focused trait manner, as they do not believe in their ability to constructively improve the situation (Abdullah et al., 2010; Carver et al., 1989).

These two types of coping have been used to explain differences in students' successful transition to university and academic success (Struthers et al., 2000). Research suggests that individuals who employ engaged problem-focused coping strategies are not only more adept at coping with problems (Julal, 2013), but that they are also more likely to seek the specifically designed assistance and institutional support that helps address and alleviate these issues (Morton et al., 2014). Studies have produced empirical evidence that problem-focused coping helps improve goal-oriented attainment in various areas, including education, by giving individuals more perceived control over their stressors and more motivation (Monzani et al., 2015; Struthers et al., 2000). Conversely, emotion focused coping has not been found to have any meaningful effect on students academic performance or motivation, though adjustment to university involves lots of challenges beyond those of the students' academic course and this form of coping may impact in other areas (Struthers et al.). Generally, though, having overly emotional reactive responses to stressors of all kinds is seen to have a negative impact, whether through suppression that results in denial and avoidance, or through increased distress: Furthermore, this emotional response is often linked to the use of, or reliance on, distractors that can often lead to further avoidance and exacerbate the problem (Julal, 2013).

These findings intimate that understanding the impact of the stressors connected with university adjustment and discovering the most effective methods of coping with them

can help student adjustment and, also, aid the identification of individuals who are most likely to struggle to offer interventions that may improve outcomes (Morton et al., 2014). Because of the established importance of coping, and the evidence that the two types of coping identified by Folkman and Lazarus (1985) are useful instruments that can help explain responses to transitional stress and retention, this study chose to investigate their effect on adjustment.

2.3 Flourishing

Alongside coping style as a predictor of successful adjustment to university, the role of well-being has been assessed. Well-being is claimed as important a factor as students' academic aptitude in successful adjustment, as failure to emotionally manage their transition can quickly lead to disenchantment and an increased likelihood of dropping out (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Because students social and emotional adjustment is seen to be such a key component in thriving and meeting the challenges of higher education this study used the Flourishing Scale; a measure developed in line with positive psychology to assess subjective feelings of well-being, in accordance with various theories that encompass social relationships, being engaged, having a meaningful life and feeling capable of accomplishing your aims or purpose (Diener et al., 2010). As it is a fairly recent development there has not been much research into education using the Flourishing scale, though Datu (2016) did find that flourishing was a significant predictor of both academic achievement and engagement amongst Filipino students.

Another reason to use the Flourishing scale is due to its claim to have advantages over other measures of psychological well-being, in that it can assess all positive and negative emotions rather than only focusing on specific ones (Diener et al., 2010). This

also makes it more adaptable and valid across cultures, whereas other, earlier measures of subjective well-being were conducted in first world, western society and more reliant on western values (Diener, 2012). This is an important concern within this study as some of participants are international students and the Flourishing scale focuses on areas of well-being it claims are found across cultures, such as social support, trust and competence (Diener). Despite this, Diener did acknowledge that there are still societal differences; for example self-esteem is a strong predictor of well-being in individualistic cultures, whilst having a good social life is more predictive in collectivist cultures.

The Flourishing scale has been reported as a significant predictor for both mental and general health, which may strongly influence student adjustment (Rump, 2015). Furthermore, it has also been related to feeling a connection to things beyond or greater than one's self, whereby an individual sees life as having meaning beyond material goods or achievements (Howell & Buro, 2015). It could be argued that this issue is increasingly relevant to university adjustment, as the continuing growth in student numbers entering university (HESA, 2017) has created the probability of a growing student population for whom studying their subject is not an authentic goal that rings true with their sense of self or intrinsic aims (Goldman, 2006). This suggests that their transition to university will be harder, as they are less likely experience a sense of accomplishment in the pursuit of knowledge or the eudaimonic well-being associated with a fully functioning life (Rump, 2015). This is relevant to this study, as it is thought that having an intrinsic motivation to achieve a goal helps create a sense of fulfillment, or flourishing, that cultivates a positive disposition; a disposition that is concomitant with good adjustment (Abdullah et al., 2010; Kristjánsson, 2012).

Flourishing is seen to measure how people thrive and achieve their most effective performance through provision of the optimal circumstances and procedures (Noble &

McGrath, 2015). The personal ability to flourish is seen to include multiple positive components including purpose, engagement, and resilience (Noble and McGrath). Because these are all attributes or aspects that are seen to encourage self-actualization and high levels of engagement within a variety of domains, including education (Rump, 2015; Sumi, 2014), this study is investigating possible associations between high levels of flourishing and good adjustment to university.

Hope

It is claimed that ability and intellect alone, are not the key determinants of academic success at university and other motivational factors that promote or prevent success must be addressed (Feldman & Kubota, 2015; Snyder et al., 2002). Associations have been found between academic success and higher levels of emotional intelligence, which are also claimed to improve the ability to manage stress; another key issue in students' adjustment to university (Parker, Duffy, Wood, Bond, & Hogan, 2005). Several longitudinal studies have found hope to be a significant predictor for successful adjustment to university (Liu et al., 2017; Martin, Swartz-Kulstad & Madson 1999; Rand, Martin & Shea, 2011; Snyder et al., 2002). Therefore, this study employed the Adult Trait Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) to investigate associations between students' levels of hope and their adjustment to university.

This model defines hope as a cognitive-motivational model focused on goals and the thinking processes related to their achievement, rather than an emotion (Snyder et al., 2002). It splits these processes into two subsets, that are positively connected and related but not synonymous: Agency explores the motivation or energy to achieve goals, and Pathways investigates the ways those goals are achieved (Snyder et al.). Moreover, the items are seen to measure separate and distinct factors that can predict distinctive

variations in well-being (Snyder et al.). There could, however, be an issue of clarity between cause and effect here, as McCrae and Costa (1986) assert that personality measures can be contaminated by the condition they aim to predict. Additionally, Snyder's definition of optimism and self-efficiency as a model of hope bears similarities to active coping strategies (Liu et al., 2017), stating that the ATHS and coping processes are closely related, as they both explore goal-orientated behaviours (Snyder et al., 1991). Yet, it must also be noted that though hope and cope may produce related correlations due to their relationship as emotional-cognitive measures, they are distinctive and each scale offers unique predictive variables (Snyder et al., 1991). The Brief Cope is found to be useful for measuring responses to specific events and aims (Monzani et al., 2015), whilst the ATHS assesses hope for goals in general (Feldman & Kubota, 2015). Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to use both measures in this study.

In both this concept of hope, and in coping, high ability or levels are said to share a strong association to successful university adjustment (Abdulla et al., 2010; Rand et al., 2011). High hope matches expectations in its negative correlations to anxiety, depression and hopelessness and Hope Scale scores have been a reliable unique predictor of the outcomes for 6-month goals related to both positive and negative affectivity (Snyder et al., 2002). Therefore, the student who has high hope and coping strategies is likely to believe they have agency over their outcomes and can overcome obstacles to achieve their aims, thereby, increasing the probability that they will achieve their aims (Snyder et al.). In a similar, motivational manner, Yeager and Dweck (2012) advocate encouraging students to develop a mindset that embraces challenges as something they can learn from and overcome. In doing this the student is actually developing and using hope, if we accept hope theory's premise that those who have high hope have better ability to envisage many ways to solve problems and see any

setbacks as opportunities to learn rather than failures (Liu et al., 2017). This strongly suggests that, beyond intellectual capacity, hope is connected to a person's belief in the ability to achieve their aims and thus increases resilience; therefore, a high hope individual is more likely to seek and find an alternative solution when faced with obstacles or disappointments (Rand et al., 2011). It is thought that interventions may encourage this self-belief and resilience, which then increases the probability of successful adjustment to university (Liu et al., 2017).

The mechanism that creates more resilience amongst individuals with high hope needs further exploration but research suggests that having high hope levels makes a person more likely to adapt coping techniques to fit differing situations and that this relieves stress and enhances well-being (Rand et al., 2011). This adaptability makes them more capable of find routes to solve problems and they also have better ability to apply the cognitive processes necessary to achieve the measures (Snyder et al., 2002). Although Liu et al., (2017) were reporting on hope in the context of students who were attending US colleges, where events had caused collective trauma, their research supported other studies (Martin et al., 1999; Rand et al., 2011; Snyder et al., 2002) in providing longitudinal support that hope is a significant predictor of improved adjustment along with the related factors of optimism and effort, therefore, it is an appropriate measure for this study.

2.5 Current study

Students have to accomplish and adapt to many new challenges to achieve a successful transition to university (Parker et al. 2005). Whilst it is likely that multiple factors and events affect students' adjustment to university (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak & Cribbie, 2007), research suggests that good coping strategies, alongside high levels of

hope and well-being encourages resilience when facing challenges or undergoing major transitions such as this (Liu et al., 2017; Rand et al., 2011). Therefore, this study was designed to explore whether coping strategies, hope levels and flourishing levels acted as predictors of student adjustment to the University of Chester's Foundation School. Adjustment was measured using the four subscales of the SACQ (Baker & Siryk, 1989): Academic Adjustment; Social Adjustment; Personal-Emotional Adjustment and Institutional Attachment. Based on previous research, the hypothesis for this study was that higher levels of hope (agency and pathways), flourishing, and the use of positive coping strategies will predict higher levels of adjustment to university in Foundation School students.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The study comprised of 81 participants in total, 40 males (49%), 39 females (48%) and 2 (3%) chose not to say. There were 66 UK students (81%), 14 international students (18%) and 1 who preferred not to say. The majority of participants (95%) were aged from 18 to 22 ($M = 19.58$, $SD = 2.04$). All participants were first year students enrolled on a variety of undergraduate courses at the University of Chester's Foundation School and approval from the Head of the Foundation School was received (see Appendix A). The research complied with the ethical code of the British Psychological Society and was approved by The University of Chester's Psychology Department Ethics Committee (see Appendices B & C).

3.2 Measures

The data were obtained using a 114-item questionnaire (see Appendix D), comprising one demographics and four validated questionnaires, as follows:

Demographics. Five questions ascertained participants' age, gender, UK or international status, ID number (optional) and travel time. These were used to test for any significant differences between the demographics and to allow the possibility of checking the results against performance data, though that was not possible within the time frame of this research.

Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1989). The SACQ is a 67-item questionnaire with acceptable internal consistency (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Feldt et al., 2011; Soledad et al., 2012). It has been widely used and is considered a key and valid instrument for measuring adjustment to higher education and aiding identification of students who could benefit from intervention (Feldt et al.; Soledad et al.). The SACQ contains four subscales of: Academic Adjustment; Social Adjustment; Personal-Emotional Adjustment and Institutional Attachment. Scores are rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Applies very closely to me) to 9 (Doesn't apply to me at all) with questions such as "Is definite about reasons for being in university" (Academic Adjustment) and "Being independent has not been easy" (Personal-Emotional Adjustment - see Appendix D); one example of approximately half of the questions that on the subscales are reverse scored (see Appendix E). For the purpose of this study, three questions from the Academic adjustment subscale were omitted at the request of the Head of the Foundation School (see Appendix E).

Academic adjustment has 21 questions and measures the student's ability to meet and cope with the intellectual and learning challenges that higher education brings including satisfaction with the academic environment and the perceived success of their efforts. Social adjustment contains 20 questions and recognises that there are many social demands related to the university environment and measures students' responses to the societal and interpersonal challenges wrought by increasing independence and the development of mature relationships. Personal-Emotional adjustment has 15 questions designed to measure physical and psychological well-being in response to stressors, whilst Institutional attachment's 14 questions explore students' satisfaction with university overall, as well as focusing more specifically on their identification and affiliation with their institution (Baker, 2002).

Total Adjustment scores range from 64 to 576 and scores for the academic, social, personal-emotional and institutional attachment subscales range from 21 to 189, 20 to 180, 15 to 135 and 14 to 126 respectively. Due to the direction of the Likert scale a low score indicates higher, self-assessed, levels of adjustment to university, therefore, negative correlations in the other measures indicate good adjustment. Shortened versions of the scale have been used in research and previous studies have omitted specific questions when not enough responses were received (Jou & Fukada, 1995; Tao, et al., 2000 in Soledad et al., 2012).

Internal consistency reliability coefficients for first semester students have been reported as ranging from .89 to .95 for the full SACQ scale (Baker & Siryk, 1989) and from .83 to .89, .83 to .91, .77 to .85, and .85 to .91 for the academic, social, personal-emotional, and attachment subscales, respectively (Baker & Siryk, 1999 in Feldt et al., 2011). Many studies have used the SACQ and reported correlations from .68 to .90 (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994).

Adult Trait Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991). The model of hope used in this paper is based on the theory conceptualized and used by used Snyder et al. (1991) in the Adult Trait Hope Scale (ATHS), a measure that has been found to be acceptably consistent and cohesive whilst showing stability over time (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 2002). The ATHS has positive correlations to other instruments designed to measure similar concepts such as optimism, self-esteem and expectancy for success (Snyder et al., 2002), and it has become the most widely used measurement of hope in the last two decades (Feldman & Kubota, 2015). The participants' level of hope was measured using the Adult Trait Hope Scale, which was designed for use with people aged 15 and over (Snyder et al., 1991). Appendix C shows this is a 12-item measure that is answered using an 8-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (definitely false) to 8 (definitely true). The ATHS is divided into two subscales that comprise Snyder's cognitive model of hope: (1) Pathways and (2) Agency. Of the 12 items, 4 make up the Pathways subscale that measures an individual's belief in their ability to find ways to achieve their aims with statements such as "there are lots of ways around any problem". A further 4 make up the Agency subscale with statements such as "I meet the goals that I set for myself" (see Appendix D), linked to the motivation to attempt and go through with a task. The remaining 4 items are fillers (Snyder et al., 1991). Higher scores suggest higher levels of hope, both within each pathway and for the Total Hope score based on the Agency and Pathways combined scores.

The Brief COPE inventory (Carver, 1997). This is an abridged version of the multi-dimensional COPE inventory designed to assess people's strategies for dealing with stress. Carver et al. (1989) took pre-existing measures and models of coping and

stress, such as that developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1985) to develop their dimensions of Coping that the Brief COPE questionnaire is based on. It is used to evaluate the role of coping responses to different stressors and is reported to have acceptable internal consistency for all 14 coping dimensions (Monzani et al., 2015). Their study affirmed the reliability and usefulness of the Brief COPE for measuring responses to specific events, though they do point out that the 14-factor structure has had very little empirical verification. The Brief Cope is a self-reported 28-item questionnaire, answered on a Likert scale from 1: I haven't been doing this at all to 4: I've been doing this a lot. The measure identifies 14 theoretical types of response with two items for each of the coping strategies and a higher score suggests more use of that form of coping strategy. Carver (1997) states there is no overall score for the measure and all the subscales were used independently.

The Flourishing Scale (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009). The eight-item Flourishing Scale is designed to measure social-psychological well-being by assessing self-reported levels of positive and negative feelings about important aspects of people's lives, ranging from personal relationships to having purposeful and engaged interactions (Diener et al., 2010). Reliability analysis in studies that have used the Flourishing Scale have shown the measure has validity (Diener et al., 2010; Silva & Caetano, 2011, Sumi, 2014). Diener et al. (2010) state the measure has internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 and high convergence with other measures of well-being, such as the Satisfaction with Life Scale or the Mental Health Continuum – Short Form, when used on a sample of students from six U.S. universities. Respondents use a Likert scale with scores ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) to answer questions such as “I lead a purposeful and meaningful life” and “I am optimistic about my future”

(see Appendix D), with a high score representing an individual who has high levels of psychological well-being and views themselves positively.

3.3 Procedure

As shown in Appendix F participants were informed of the purpose and objectives of the study through an introductory email sent by the researcher to all Foundation School Students in the week before the questionnaires were delivered. These were repeated in person toward the end of a normal academic session in the first week after Easter, when they were invited to complete the questionnaires. In line with BPS requirements, all participants were informed that completion of the questionnaires was voluntary, that it would take approximately fifteen minutes and that they could opt out at any time during the process. They were assured that results would be kept confidential and that consent was assumed upon them returning the completed forms. Those students who agreed to participate were then given hard copies of the information sheets and questionnaire, including instructions on how to complete them (see Appendix D). Participants were also told they could leave any questions they did not want to answer blank, or use the “prefer not to answer” option: These responses were deleted from the results before analysis.

Upon completion, participants received a verbal and written debrief (see Appendix G), which thanked them for their time and gave them contact information for myself and my supervisor, should they wish to further discuss the research or any issues arising from it. The debrief also contained contact details for support services, if required. The participants were thanked for their time and involvement and asked to return the questionnaires to a box at the front as they left the room. The participants were not provided with any payment for engaging with the research.

3.4 Analysis and Design

This study employed a quantitative approach based on participants' self-reported answers to a 115 item Likert scale questionnaires. Before analysis, the data were screened for missing data and six of the eighty-seven returned forms were discarded due to a lack of sufficient responses. Results were analysed using IBM SPSS V22, scales requiring reverse scoring were reversed and the series mean replacement method was used to replace those where less than 10% of the data were missing, in accordance with Baker and Siryk's (1989) recommendations.

Descriptive statistics were obtained and Cronbach's alphas were performed to test for internal reliability of the measures. The data were also analysed using independent t-tests, and one-way ANOVAs to look at differences in scores between UK and international students. Pearson's correlations were, also, completed to identify predictors for the series of standard multiple hierarchical regressions carried out to identify possible predictors of the four subscales of SACQ.

4. Results

The main aim of the study was to investigate whether the variables of hope, cope and flourishing were predictors of adjustment to university in foundation degree students at the University of Chester. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the students by type and age.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies for student type and age (*N* 81)

| | | Number | Percent (Rounded) |
|--------------|-----------------------|--------|----------------------|
| Student Type | International Student | 14 | 17 |
| | UK Student | 66 | 81 |
| | Prefer not to say | 1 | 1 |
| Age | 17 | 1 | 1.2 |
| | 18 | 13 | 16 |
| | 19 | 39 | 48 |
| | 20 | 19 | 23 |
| | 21 | 2 | 3 |
| | 22 | 4 | 5 |
| | 23 | 1 | 1 |
| | 30 | 1 | 1 |
| | 31 | 1 | 1 |

Means, Standard Deviations and Cronbach's alphas were computed to test the reliability of the measures used. This is shown in Table 2. As shown, results of Cronbach's coefficients alpha for the scales for Hope Total, Academic Adjustment Total and all of its subscales are within the range of validity, whilst the scales for Flourishing and Hope, are < 0.70. However, results measured just below reliability but above .60 so it is not too problematic. Also, Flourishing proved to be non-significant as a predictor for student adjustment so this did not affect the results.

Table 2. Means, SD's and Cronbach's alphas for total scales and subscales for SACQ, Hope, Coping and Flourishing scales (N 81) .

| Measure | Mean | Std. Deviation | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--------------------------|--------|----------------|------------------|
| Hope Total | 47.75 | 7.35 | 0.77 |
| Hope pathways | 24.2 | 3.79 | 0.62 |
| Hope agency | 23.54 | 4.42 | 0.66 |
| Flourish Total | 42.9 | 8.71 | 0.63 |
| Student Adjustment Total | 298.79 | 36.98 | 0.71 |
| Academic Adjustment | 97.57 | 22.33 | 0.81 |
| Social Adjustment | 79.67 | 23.43 | 0.83 |
| Personal Adjustment | 72.18 | 21.81 | 0.77 |
| Attachment To University | 25.64 | 13.93 | 0.88 |
| Self-distraction | 2.74 | 0.84 | * |
| Active coping | 2.65 | 0.74 | |
| Denial | 1.65 | 0.86 | |
| Substance use | 1.72 | 1 | |
| Emotional support | 2.18 | 0.95 | |
| Instrumental support | 2.26 | 0.95 | |
| Disengagement | 1.61 | 0.71 | |
| Venting | 2.11 | 0.89 | |
| Positive reframing | 2.51 | 0.94 | |
| Planning | 2.67 | 0.93 | |
| Humour | 2.61 | 1.02 | |
| Acceptance | 2.69 | 0.9 | |
| Religion | 1.55 | 0.91 | |
| Self Blame | 2.51 | 0.97 | |

*Coping subsets only contained two items so Cronbach's alpha could not be used.

Inferential statistics: Differences between UK and international students. A

series of independent *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in the scores for each of the measures between UK and international students. The results of these showed statistically significant differences between the two groups in four variables only; Hope agency, disengagement, religion and substance use. In particular, compared to UK students (N=66), International students (N=14) scored significantly higher for:

- Hope agency: $t(78) = 2.14$, $p = .035$

• Disengagement: $t(78) = 3.06$, $p = .003$ (Coping)

• Religion: $t(15.26) = 2.54$, $p = .022$ (Coping)

UK students scored higher for Substance Use as a coping mechanism: $t(54.92) = -4.49$, $p < .001$. All other measures showed no significant differences (see Appendix I).

Predictors of adjustment to university. As a first stage to the multiple regressions, the data were analysed using a series of Pearson's r correlations for parametric data, as the histograms showed sufficiently normal distribution (see Appendix H). A summary of the significant results, only, are below, with the full table of correlations, also showing the non-significant results in Appendix I.

Table 3. Significant Correlations with Academic Adjustment ($N = 81$)

| Variable | r |
|----------------|----------|
| Hope Pathways | -0.37*** |
| Hope Agency | -0.46*** |
| Active Coping | -0.34*** |
| Denial | 0.25* |
| Substance Use | 0.25* |
| Disengagement | 0.40*** |
| Humour | 0.36*** |
| Flourish Total | -0.33*** |

Table 4. Significant Correlations with Social Adjustment ($N = 81$)

| Variable | R |
|----------------|----------|
| Hope Pathways | -0.30** |
| Hope Agency | -0.42*** |
| Active Coping | -0.33*** |
| Disengagement | 0.36*** |
| Flourish Total | -0.30** |
| Gender | 0.28** |
| Age in years | 0.21* |

Table 5. Significant Correlations with Personal-Emotional Adjustment ($N = 81$)

| Variable | r |
|----------------|---------|
| Hope Pathways | -0.28** |
| Hope Agency | -0.24* |
| Disengagement | 0.45*** |
| Denial | 0.37*** |
| Substance Use | 0.27** |
| Humour | 0.35*** |
| Self Blame | 0.33*** |
| Flourish Total | -0.28** |

Table 6. Significant Correlations with Institutional Attachment to university ($N = 81$)

| Variable | R |
|---------------|--------|
| Student Type | -0.26* |
| Denial | 0.26* |
| Disengagement | 0.26* |
| Religion | 0.28** |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient determined which predictors could be entered into the multiple regressions for the 4 subscales of the SACQ. These relationships suggest:

- Academic Adjustment to university was most positively related to Hope Agency, Hope Pathways and Active Coping, whilst Disengagement and Humour showed the largest negative correlations.
- Social Adjustment shows the largest positive correlation to Hope Agency, Hope Pathways and Active Coping. Disengagement shows the largest negative correlation.
- Personal-Emotional adjustment shows the strongest correlations to the maladaptive coping variables of Disengagement and Denial
- Attachment to university shows a positive correlation to religion and student type. Denial and Disengagement are negatively correlated.

Durbin-Watson statistics of between 1.52 and 2.11 for the adjustment subscales suggests the assumption of independent errors is tenable.

Multiple Regressions. Table 7 shows the variables entered as possible predictors of Academic Adjustment, over 3 steps. Here, the results found that three predictors explained almost 40% of the variance in Academic Adjustment ($R^2 = .40$; Adj. $R^2 = .33$, $F(8,80) = 5.946$, $p < .001$), all of which were related to styles of coping only. In particular, higher levels of academic adjustment were significantly predicted by higher levels of active coping (Beta = $-.24$, $p = 0.025$), and lower levels of disengagement (Beta = $.21$; $p = 0.048$) and humour (Beta = $.26$; $p = 0.013$). Results also show that, whilst Hope Agency was a significant predictor of Academic Adjustment at Step 1 (Beta = $-.37$; $p = 0.004$), the addition of Coping strategies at Step 2 changed this.

Table 8 shows the variables entered as possible predictors of Social Adjustment, over 4 steps. Here, the results found that four predictors explained 38% of the variance in Social Adjustment ($R^2 = .38$; Adj. $R^2 = .32$, $F(7,78) = 6.31$, $p < .001$). In particular, higher levels of Social Adjustment were significantly predicted by higher levels of Hope Agency (Beta = $-.37$, $p = 0.006$) in the first step, and lower levels of Disengagement (Beta = $.26$; $p = 0.017$). Lower age (Beta = $.27$; $p = 0.006$) and male Gender (Beta = $.22$; $p = 0.026$) also predicted higher levels of Social Adjustment. As also shown, whilst Hope Agency was a significant predictor of Social Adjustment at Step 1, the addition of coping strategies at Step 2 superseded its effect.

Table 9 shows the variables entered as possible predictors of Personal Adjustment, over 3 steps. Here, the results found that lower levels of Disengagement (Beta = $.34$; $p = 0.004$) was the only significant predictor of higher levels of personal adjustment, accounting for 26% of the variance in Personal Adjustment ($R^2 = .34$; Adj. $R^2 = .27$, $F(8,80) = 6.31$, $p < .001$).

Table 10 shows the variables entered as possible predictors of Institutional Attachment, over 2 steps. Here, the results found that student type (Beta = $.26$; $p = 0.020$) was a significant predictor with lower levels of attachment for international students. The only other significant predictor for attachment was religion (Beta = $.24$; $p = 0.037$). These accounted for 14% of the variance in Institutional Attachment ($R^2 = .18$; Adj. $R^2 = .14$, $F(4,80) = 4.19$, $p = 0.04$).

Table 7. Regression to identify predictors of Academic Adjustment to university

| Variable | Step 1 | | | Step 2 | | | Step3 | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-------|---------|--------|-------|---------|
| | b | SE b | β | b | SE b | β | b | SE b | β |
| Constant | 162.68 | 14.98 | | 117.66 | 20.00 | | 122.03 | 20.60 | |
| Hope Pathways | -0.87 | 0.74 | -.15 | -0.24 | 0.74 | -.04 | -0.02 | 0.78 | .00 |
| Hope Agency | -1.87 | 0.63 | -.37* | -1.03 | 0.62 | -.20 | -0.87 | 0.65 | -.17 |
| Active Coping | | | | -7.34 | 3.20 | -.24** | -7.58 | 3.21 | -.25** |
| Denial | | | | 1.83 | 2.68 | .07 | 1.64 | 2.69 | .06 |
| Substance Use | | | | 0.34 | 2.41 | .02 | 0.02 | 2.44 | .00 |
| Disengagement | | | | 6.66 | 3.31 | .21** | 7.17 | 3.36 | .23** |
| Humour | | | | 5.71 | 2.24 | .26* | 5.43 | 2.27 | .25** |
| Flourish Total | | | | | | | -0.28 | 0.31 | -.11 |
| Adjusted R ² | | 0.21 | | | 0.33 | | | 0.33 | |
| F for change in R ² | | 11.32* | | | 3.98* | | | 0.82 | |

*p < .01. **p < .05

Table 8. Regression to identify predictors of Social Adjustment to university

| Variable | Step 1 | | | Step 2 | | | Step 3 | | | Step 4 | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-------|------|--------|-------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| | b | SE b | β | b | SE b | B | b | SE b | β | b | SE b | β |
| Constant | 137.53 | 16.39 | | 117.72 | 18.37 | | 121.09 | 18.39 | | 47.61 | 28.31 | |
| Hope Pathways | -0.51 | 0.80 | -.08 | -0.25 | 0.78 | -.04 | 0.21 | 0.84 | .04 | 0.00 | 0.80 | .00 |
| Hope Agency | -1.94 | 0.68 | -.37** | -1.25 | 0.69 | -.24 | -0.94 | 0.72 | -.18 | -0.72 | 0.69 | -.14 |
| Active Coping | | | | -6.03 | 3.50 | -.19 | -6.82 | 3.52 | -.22 | -5.26 | 3.36 | -.17 |
| Disengagement | | | | 8.32 | 3.41 | .26* | 8.87 | 3.41 | .27* | 7.77 | 3.24 | .24* |
| Flourish Total | | | | | | | -0.48 | 0.34 | -.18 | -0.61 | 0.32 | -.22 |
| Gender | | | | | | | | | | 10.37 | 4.57 | .22* |
| Age | | | | | | | | | | 3.11 | 1.10 | .27** |
| Adjusted R ² | | 0.16 | | | 0.27 | | | 0.29 | | | 0.39 | |
| F for change in R ² | | 8.28** | | | 4.4* | | | 2.04 | | | 5.62** | |

*p < .01. **p < .05

Table 9: Regression to identify predictors of Personal-Emotional Adjustment to university

| Variable | Step 1 | | | Step 2 | | | Step3 | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-------|---------|-------|-------|---------|
| | B | SE b | β | B | SE b | β | b | SE b | β |
| (Constant) | 114.07 | 15.91 | | 44.91 | 21.50 | | 50.45 | 21.79 | |
| Hope Pathways | -1.20 | 0.78 | -.21 | -0.69 | 0.73 | -.12 | -0.37 | 0.77 | -.07 |
| Hope Agency | -0.55 | 0.67 | -.11 | 0.24 | 0.63 | .05 | 0.48 | 0.65 | .10 |
| Disengagement | | | | 9.63 | 3.44 | .315* | 10.31 | 3.46 | 0.337* |
| Denial | | | | 3.84 | 2.75 | .15 | 3.49 | 2.75 | .14 |
| Substance Use | | | | 2.33 | 2.47 | .11 | 1.84 | 2.49 | .09 |
| Humour | | | | 3.22 | 2.49 | .15 | 2.54 | 2.53 | .12 |
| Self Blame | | | | 1.63 | 2.64 | .07 | 2.13 | 2.65 | .09 |
| FlourishTotal | | | | | | | -0.42 | 0.32 | -.17 |
| Adjusted R ² | | 0.06 | | | 0.26 | | | 0.26 | |
| F for change in R ² | | 3.55** | | | 5.23* | | | 1.77 | |

*p<.01.**p<.05.

Table 10: Regression to identify predictors of Institutional Attachment to university

| Variable | Step 1 | | | Step 2 | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------|---------|--------|-------|---------|
| | b | SE b | β | b | SE b | β |
| Constant | 42.16 | 7.10 | | 16.02 | 10.79 | |
| Student type | -8.98 | 3.77 | -.26* | -3.32 | 4.10 | -.10 |
| Denial | | | | 2.55 | 1.85 | .16 |
| Disengagement | | | | 3.59 | 2.33 | .18 |
| Religion | | | | 3.69 | 1.74 | .24* |
| Adjusted R ² | | 0.05 | | | 0.14 | |
| F for change in R ² | | 5.67* | | | 3.51* | |

*p < .05

5. Discussion

The aim of the study was to test the hypothesis that students' Hope, Cope and Flourishing levels predict their adjustment to university as measured on the SACQ. The initial results of the correlations showed similarities to previous research with positive correlations between Hope, Flourishing and Active Coping to Academic and Social Adjustment, whilst Hope and Flourishing also show significant correlations to Personal-Emotional adjustment, though none are significant to Attachment to the university. Results also met expectations through indicating significant negative correlations between adjustment and the maladaptive or avoidant coping strategies of Disengagement, Denial and Humour (related to making light of issues instead of addressing them). Disengagement has a strong correlation to less successful adjustment and shows significant correlations in all subscales. The pattern of correlations across all subscales of the adjustment measure, except Attachment to the institution, did initially suggest an association between effective adjustment and students with high hope and/or who use active coping strategies. There are corresponding results for various maladaptive coping measures such as denial, substance use, disengagement, and humour, which are negatively associated with successful adaptation to university. These findings were in line with previous studies as these mechanisms are related to neurotic coping, which results in poorer outcomes (McCrae & Costa, 1986).

However, when these significant variables were used to run multiple hierarchical regressions for each of the four adjustment measures Flourishing and Hope Pathways were not significant, whilst Hope Agency was only significant when measured alone and not a significant predictor when the Coping mechanisms were added. Active and maladaptive coping accounted for 40% of the variance in Academic adjustment and

disengagement was found to be a significant negative predictor of both Social and Personal-Emotional adjustment.

This lack of significant effect of Hope as a predictor for adjustment was not expected from the literature and previous results, as having higher hope is said to cause one to approach challenges with a positive attitude and greater belief in success (Snyder, 1995) and evidence from several studies on undergraduate students have shown that goal-directed hope predicted better results and self-efficacy (Feldman & Kubota, 2015; Liu et al., 2017; Martin et al., 1999; Rand et al., 2011). One caveat is that the majority of research around the effect of hope has involved high school students and there will be other stressors and demographic factors related to the greater age, independence and responsibilities of university students that makes generalizations from tertiary education problematic (Rand et al., 2011).

There could also be an issue of clarity between cause and effect that impacted results, as suggested by McCrae and Costa's (1986) assertion that personality measures can be contaminated by the condition they aim to predict. Therefore, it is possible that Hope's lack of effect could be the result of some demographic and performance factor unique to the use of Foundation School students in this study. The students surveyed were undertaking an extra Foundation Year because they failed to achieve the grades needed for their original choice of course (which may also have been at another institution), or because they were international students. It is possible that this may have made them more focused on the goal directed aspect of completing the year, seeing it as an obstacle to overcome before they commenced their 'proper' undergraduate course. This matches the assumption that Hope Agency is related to the goal determination to achieve an aim; the "will" to finish a paper or succeed in your degree (Snyder, 1995). It also fits with the claim that it has been found to predict levels of completion amongst

students (Geraghty, Wood & Hyland, 2009). This makes it more likely that the importance of hope has been subsumed by that of coping strategies and this has had a direct impact on the Hope results, reducing their value, whilst emphasizing the importance of Coping, which was expected from the literature (Julal, 2013; Morton et al., 2014). This explanation can be further supported in that Snyder et al. (1991)'s definition of optimism and self-efficiency as a model of hope bears similarities to active coping strategies; stating that the ATHS and coping processes are closely related, as they are both cognitive-emotional measures designed to explore goal-orientated behaviour (Liu et al., 2017) and they did produce similar correlations in this study, which was an expectation (Snyder et al., 1991).

Alongside the choice of participants, the survey method could have led to a degree of self-selection from more motivated students, not only from the voluntary aspect but due to the fact that these students had already reached a late stage of their first academic year of study and were attending their lecture, suggesting they were likely to be committed students who would complete the year. Moreover, as they were approaching the end of their course and had completed most of their assignments, some of the students may have been very confident of achieving the 40% overall pass needed to progress. Therefore, the predominance of coping here is in alignment with the belief that the Brief Cope is more useful than Hope for measuring attitudes to specific events and aims (Monzani et al., 2015). Additionally, as their marks would not count toward their degrees, they could have been mentally disengaging from the Foundation Course as a hurdle that they had almost overcome. This may also help explain the unexpected finding of higher Disengagement alongside higher Hope amongst the international students. These variables are usually found in opposite directions as high hope has been reported to facilitate self-efficacy and motivation (Liu et al., 2017, Snyder et al., 2002),

whereas the maladaptive coping technique of disengagement suggests the opposite. A further explanation for the international students higher hope is that they had probably not suffered the same setbacks as the UK students. In fact it is likely that the opportunity to study abroad was regarded as a very positive accomplishment, though the year spent at the Foundation School would still be seen as preparatory to their actual degree. Additionally, the higher scores for Hope Agency amongst international students does correspond with the expectation of lower scores for substance abuse; which showed the greatest difference between the two groups.

These specific issues with the demographic do not fully explain why Hope Pathways aspect was not significant at any point, however, this facet is reported to indicate a greater ability to find solutions and redirect energies to overcome obstacles (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 2002). This is especially relevant to the UK cohort, as previous research suggests that students with these qualities would be more likely to have gained better results (Feldman & Kubota, 2015), therefore, they would not have needed to attend the Foundation School. This demographic issue could also contribute to the significance of maladaptive coping, whereby avoiding issues with distractors was found to have a significant negative effect on Academic and Personal-Emotional adjustment. Furthermore, the UK students had significantly higher levels of the negative coping trait of substance abuse, though further research would be needed to show if this was related to adjustment issues or was more directly influenced by the social culture and expectations of UK students, often living independently for the first time (El Ansari, Vallentin-Holbech, & Stock, 2015).

Another possible explanation for the significant contribution of Cope over Hope is that, though hope has been found as a significant predictor of student adjustment (Liu et al., 2017), other factors related to the students' interests and goals and their overall

compatibility to the institution are also relevant (Feldt et al., 2011; Martin et al., 1999). For example, students may make an entirely sensible and realistic decision that the course they are taking does not suit their aims or attributes or have ended up in a location that does not cater for their interests and temperament (perhaps even more likely for these participants), and neither of these problems are particularly related to an individual's hope levels. Also, though high hope levels have been correlated to academic achievement and GPA there are claims that it has not been fully established whether interventions can or do increase these levels and outcomes, or if hope is significant for overall adjustment in the same way as it is for academic grades (Feldman & Kubota, 2015).

Snyder et al.'s (1991) statement, that hope is related to specific problem-focused coping, resulting in better outcomes or rates of achievement that improve well-being could also explain why this study found that adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies have a significant effect on adjustment that supersedes high hope: It has already been established that Hope and Cope share a strong relationship as cognitive-motivational constructs with a focus on targets, ambitions or aspirations (Liu et al., 2017; Snyder et al., 2002). Therefore, in finding Cope but not Hope significant, these results could suggest that simply having hope is different than being able, or knowledgeable enough, to act on it. This interpretation is given further credence considering that Hope Agency was the only Hope variable found at all significant, and this aspect is strongly related to the claim that students who score highly on it are far more likely to regard failure as a challenge to be approached through problem focused, active coping (Snyder et al., 1991, Snyder 2002). Though this does not fully explain the lack of significance of Hope Pathways and only partial influence of Hope Agency in this study, it does suggest an overlap that supports the enhance value and significance of Coping: Indicating that what

is needed and effective is the ability to enact and enable hope through specific measures or methods that are found within coping behaviour, strategies and flexibility (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2013).

In fact, although Snyder et al., (1991) maintain they are discrete entities, hope has been recognized as both an antecedent to coping and a motivational strategy for it (Alexander & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Studies have shown that having high hope mitigates fear of failure and is linked to the ability to cope with problems, whilst low levels of hope are linked to high anxiety and maladaptive coping techniques such as the disengagement and use of humour found significant in this study (Alexander & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). This could indicate that this study found high hope less important because having hope is not necessarily the same as having the attributes or tools to actually accomplish tasks. Whilst hope could have an influence on the “will” to accomplish goals, as Snyder et al., (1991) claim; the “ways” to achieve these aims has been more strongly linked to active coping strategies than Hope Pathways (Monzani et al., 2015). This is supported by Coping accounting for 40% of academic adjustment, suggesting that successfully accomplishing the “goal” of adjusting to university is more related to coping strategies and abilities than levels of hope overall and, more specifically, that coping is a significant predictor whilst Hope Pathways is not. Concomitantly, avoidance through maladaptive coping strategies was found to have a significant negative affect on adjustment, whereas hope levels were not significant. This strongly indicates that the Brief Cope was more relevant to measuring the specific aims of the participants in this study (Monzani et al.) than the ATHS, which assesses hope for goals in general (Feldman & Kubota, 2015): Although there will be general issues of adjustment and transition that affect all first year students, it appears likely that the issue of adjustment for this cohort will be strongly related to the specific aim of passing their

Foundation Year and progressing to their degree courses. Whereas, first year undergraduate students may have other priorities, as the final results that effect their future are still three to four years away.

Alongside other issues, this almost immediate focus on results helps explain why age and gender were significant factors in the Social Adjustment subscale, where it was found that younger students and males adjusted better. Firstly, the vast majority of students start university straight from school or college in their late adolescence (87% were aged between 18-20 in this study) so they will be far more likely to see each other as part of the same peer group with many similar social references and experiences within their institutions and courses and many will share the same experience of living independently for the first time (Morton et al., 2014). This is not to claim that students are a homogenous monoculture but those outside this age group may find it harder to fit in to the social aspects, or may not want to (Stone & O'Shea, 2013). They are more likely to already lived independently and have other commitments, relationships and responsibilities that create added pressures and guilt, especially over time and money issues, which can have a negative impact on their social adjustment or attitude to it (Stone & O'Shea). This difference in social adjustment and its impact is reflected in retention statistics, as 11.7% of mature did not continue after their first year in 2014/15 compared to 6.2% of young full time first degree students, and retention rates for part-time students are even worse with a 37.3% drop out rate after their second year in 2013/14 (HESA, 2017). As reported, the vast majority of participants in this study were aged 18-20, which may also have influenced the results.

Social adjustment results also indicated that gender was significant and being male was a positive predictor. Although Stone and O'Shea (2013) were researching mature students they found gender had a significant impact, with women receiving far less

support and having more additional responsibilities than men. The lack of mature females in this study would make the impact of this negligible, however, research has also found that, in general, women were more academically motivated than men (Baker, 2004) and this greater focus on their studies and achievement may well have an impact on social adjustment. Gerdes & Mallinckrodt (1994) reported worse outcomes for students who adapted poorly to the social demands whilst overestimating their academic prowess. This may be particularly relevant for younger, female students away from home for the first time, especially if they feel pressured to socialize over studying because having a good time and making new friends is seen as key expectation of transition (Kantanis, 2000). This could become a stressor and adversely affect them if they believe it is having a negative impact on their academic progress.

From the literature and claims about these scales, an argument could be made that high hope levels and effective coping are bi-directional as they both explore goal-orientated behaviours that are dependent on whether someone perceives their situation as controllable and that they can affect outcomes (Snyder et al., 1991). Whilst studies on undergraduate students have shown goal-directed hope predicted better results and self-efficacy (Feldman & Kubota, 2015; Rand et al., 2011). Snyder (2002) states that cognitively focusing on a specific goal is the foundation of hope theory, and the results of this study suggest that this may be better addressed or explained through coping approaches, rather than hope.

It also raises a further question about adjustment and why some students persevere: Why would a student who has succeeded throughout their tertiary education attending university with high expectations and belief in their ability to cope and find solutions not be more crushed by setbacks than one arriving with low expectations who contemplated difficulties? Significant findings in other studies suggest that it is a

person's cognitive approach and the motivation it fosters that is important, and that this can have positive effects beyond academic ability (Liu et al., 2017; Martin et al., 1999; Rand et al., 2011; Snyder et al., 2002). To be effective, active coping involves planning, focused engagement that avoids distractions and can even involve waiting for the opportune moment (Monzani et al., 2015; Morton et al., 2014). Conversely, negative, maladaptive responses could divert attention from the problem to other, less relevant issues, or employ a variety of distractions through other activities, or sleep, that result in behavioural and/or mental disengagement (Carver et al., 1989). This is a form of denial, and though it can have the short-term benefit of reducing stress levels it can impede coping or make it more difficult later due to re-emergence or exacerbation of the stressor (Carver et al.). Conversely, good coping strategies encourage a positive, active and resilient disposition, resulting in further positive steps that serve to moderate negative thoughts and other risk factors that can spiral down into disorder or depression (Layous et al., 2014).

Although McCrae and Costa (1986) state, it may be that neurotics are unhappy because they cope poorly, they also assert that intervention studies should be conducted to see if strategies could be taught and changed. This supports the idea that we should aim to improve people's ability to cope with disappointments and lessen negative thoughts by encouraging active, positive responses. This can be accomplished through pro-social actions toward others, writing out a list of one's values or positive consequences from a previous negative experience and showing gratitude (Layous, Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2014). It has been demonstrated that these types of activities resulted in long term benefits, helping improve the emotional response to adversity, making a person feel they have a better internal locus of control and autonomy over their situation (Mongrain & Anselmo-Williams, 2012; Seligman, Steen,

Park & Peterson, 2005). This effectiveness may occur because active problem solving gives one a feeling of dominance or control over events. As these are valued attributes in western culture it can result in a reframing of positive emotions and may, again, help to explain the dominance of cope over hope in this study (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004).

Of course there is a difference between positive effect and positive mood and the focus of interventions is not just to make someone feel good. A criticism sometimes made at today's students is that they are a part of a diminished, "snowflake" generation who lack resilience and are overly vulnerable to criticism and setbacks (Hayes, 2017). There is a concurrent worry that normal adolescent behaviour is being pathologized, with a phalanx of psychological well-being practitioners and anti-stress activities required to nurture students' self-esteem and protect their feelings (Hayes). This has been posited an issue that can detrimentally affect expectations and adjustment to university (Hayes) and there has been associated research suggesting that the "grit effect" predicts better retention rates in education, alongside the workplace, military and marriage, for those who have this quality (Eskreis-Winkler, Schulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014). Yet, despite the stark nomenclature, "grit" is actually defined as an individual's "passion and perseverance for long-term goals" (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014), qualities that have been strongly associated with active coping, hope and flourishing. In fact, this designation neatly dovetails with the belief that improvements in students coping strategies, success and retention are most effective if they have an intrinsic motivation and interest in their course beyond getting a degree (Layous et al., 2014; Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012). Furthermore, this intrinsic motivation, alongside the ability to regulate or cope effectively with problems and issues has been associated with better persistence and retention rates (Baker, 2004). This again,

illustrates that “grit” and adapting problem-focused coping skills appear to share a strong resemblance, as they are both predicated on perseverance in that they make one more likely to pursue goals and find solution to setbacks rather than give up (Julal, 2013).

There is still an issue with person-goal fit: Regardless of its name, if an intervention is to be used to improve students coping strategies and help them succeed and continue on their course it will work most effectively if that goal has an intrinsic motivation beyond simply passing (Layous et al., 2014; Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012). This idea of intrinsic motivation and person-goal fit could be related to the finding in Credé & Niehorster’s (2011) meta-analysis of the SACQ, that the relationship between institutional attachment and retention was larger than any other predictor. Though it may be relevant that the intention to leave is directly asked and students with low scores in the other three adjustment scales are also more likely to have low institutional attachment too.

Considering these findings, it is perhaps surprising that this study found no significant effect of hope or coping as predictors for attachment or affiliation, though other factors may have effected these results: The Foundation School is in its own building, separate from main campus (though some live in university halls and most (n,59) live within 30 minutes of the university. As stated previously, all these students are attending as a compulsory extra year, before they begin their designated degree course, though they are still fully integrated and recognized as University of Chester students. Student type was a predictor with less attachment for international students, this is unsurprising as there are specific issues of integration and long-term plans that may make attachment less emotive and important to international students than UK

students, and they may also be focused on more pressing needs for their adjustment, such as language skills and support with cultural integration (Andrade, 2006).

Although this paper was completed before retention rates were available sixty-seven students stated they were committed or very committed to staying at the institution, ten were neutral and just four were not committed. However, there was also a contrary finding as nineteen students professed a strong commitment to applying to continue their studies at another university. Again, the nature of the participants may make the issue of transferring to another institution (perhaps even one they originally wanted to attend and were rejected from) more probable than with first year undergraduates and could also affect levels of attachment and related factors. It may be these issues rather than, or alongside, those related to social support and a sense of belonging that affected the results. Though this cannot be definitely ascertained, it does suggest that a longitudinal study would be advantageous.

Another reason why institutional attachment may have less importance to adjustment is suggested in Galatzer-Levy et al.'s (2013) finding that better results in improving students stress management actually appear to come from informal support networks created by the students than from institutionally led community building initiatives. However, it is not clear if the students would regard these networks as institutional or personal attachment. The focus on institutional attachment and social support is connected to the idea that mental well-being is key to adjustment and that, rather than a lack of illness, it should be predicated on a person's positive psychological state; feeling purposeful, satisfied and happy with their life as well as interested in and connected to others (Fink, 2014). This could help explain why religion was also found to be a significant factor in attachment as individuals with religious faith are often found to have the ability to find more meaning and purpose in their life and can find new

connections to ameliorate the loss of preexisting social networks through their faith, helping transition (Yoon et al., 2015). There is also a connection between faith and having a connection to things greater than one's self that gives life a meaning beyond materialism or achievements that enhances well-being, which has been associated with a positive impact on adjustment (Howell & Buro, 2015). This does not fully explain why the impact of religion should be significant on institutional attachment but not the other subscales, though the University of Chester does have a strong and historic faith foundation and having faith is seen to improve overall well-being and help people find a greater satisfaction with their life and circumstances, which may help produce this positive effect (Yoon et al.).

Nonetheless, if it was simply, or mostly, well-being that predicted adjustment then we would expect the Flourishing Scale to have been significant. This scale is seen to measure well-being through a positive disposition and other studies have associated it with good adjustment (Abdullah et al., 2010; Diener et al., 2010; Howell & Buro, 2015). Its importance has also been signaled in research showing that students who suffer high stress in relation to their adjustment and academic challenges are found to obtain lower grades (Pluut, Curseu & Ilies, 2015). Considering these findings it was somewhat unexpected that Flourishing was not found to be a significant predictor in this study. However, Diener et al. claim the Flourishing scale has been shown to have substantial correlations with other levels of affective well-being, most strongly with mastery, which may explain why it may not have predicted adjustment in this study even though it has been connected to it. Diener et al. state that the source of this overlap, along with the identification of distinctive contributions, indicates an important direction for study. This suggests flourishing may be a better instrument for directly measuring levels of life-satisfaction, rather than adjustment to university. Though it

could still be useful in further research, as a measurement to track students' well-being and offer evidence to initiate institutional changes that could positively affect this (Howell & Buro, 2015).

Another issue with the Flourishing scale in this paper is that causal direction is not explained with this form of study (Diener, 2012). Whilst having good active coping strategies and avoiding maladaptive distractions can be seen as attributes that are positively associated with good adjustment it is hard to assess if scoring high on flourishing has caused a person to adjust well or if good adjustment has created the disposition; analogous to McCrae and Costa's (1986) assertion that high hope individuals who are happy feel that way because they cope well. In another similarity to the Hope measure, there also appears to be a close relationship between the positive attributes found in flourishing individuals and the inherent advantage of good coping mechanisms, as illustrated through the similar terms or coping components posited by Folkman et al. (1986), then further developed by Carver Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) as the positive traits measured in the COPE questionnaire: These include reinterpretation and growth, seeking social support, self-controlling, acceptance of responsibility, and strategic problem solving (Abdullah et al., 2010). This may explain why, just as with the Hope results, the importance of Flourishing as a predictor for adjustment appears to have been incorporated into Coping.

There are limitations with this study that may have contributed to the findings in it. Whilst the sample size was adequate the number of responses was at the low end to obtain validity for the number of variables used in the regressions (Field, 2005). Self-related studies are always problematic and discovering how and why student adjustment is related to the form of subjective well-being measured on the Flourishing scale, and how this actually predicts actions and outcomes, requires far more in-depth, longitudinal

research that explores and examines changes (Diener, 2012). A longitudinal study would also offer a clearer picture of adjustment over time with stronger evidence and information on results and retention to support any arguments. The particular needs and position of the Foundation School students has already been mentioned and the findings suggest that future research must take great care to avoid assessing students as a homogenous group undertaking the same experience, or even requiring the same outcomes, when measuring adjustment. There are, of course, other factors to be taken into consideration when assessing students' adjustment, such as inter-role conflict between study and leisure, an aspect that particularly affects young adults who are mostly leaving home to live independently for the first time (Pluut, et al., 2015).

6. Conclusion

This study supported the significance of Coping strategies in several key aspects of student adjustment, though the lack of significance for Hope and Flourishing were unexpected. There were issues regarding the participants that may have unduly affected these results, as discussed. It would also have been preferable and produced more validity if the study had been longitudinal and continued after results and retention rates were available for analysis. Yet, the importance of coping strategies does raise the possibility and importance of intervention in this area, supported by Galatzer-Levy et al., (2013) who found that students who could adopt and adapt a variety of coping methods were more resilient when faced with challenges. Multiple coping strategies and flexibility were seen to provide the best outcomes, including the declaration of positive emotions, being active and pro-social. Though the transition to university contains multiple and complex issues and there is no simple solution, it may be that it is not the problems faced but the approach to those problems that most affects outcomes and that

this is neither fixed nor predominantly dependent on individual differences and academic ability. Considering the interest and investment in student well-being, further research that can enhance student adjustment and enable them to meet the challenges involved in the transition to higher education is urgently needed (Howell & Buro, 2015).

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Appendices

Appendix A. Permission for the study



28 March 2017

To whom it may concern:

Re: Stephen Adams' dissertation

This letter provides confirmation that I agree to Stephen Adams' MA Psychology (Conversion) dissertation focusing on the experience of University of Chester Foundation School students. I am aware that Stephen will be asking students to respond to a questionnaire, which I have had sight of, on a voluntary basis and that they will be informed of the answers being collated and analysed as part of the write-up for Stephen's thesis.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jan O'Driscoll".

Jan O'Driscoll
Head of the Foundation School
Foundation School
University of Chester
Room CGW103
Gateway House
86 Northgate Street
Chester CH1 2HT

Office: 01244 512898
Mobile: 07979 777685
janodriscoll@chester.ac.uk

Appendix B. Ethics Application

Staff / Office Use Only **DOPEC NUMBER:** _____

Umbrella project DOPEC number (staff) _____

APPLICANT SURNAME: ADAMS

Please complete all questions by underlining the correct response to facilitate correct processing

APPLICANT: UG PGT PGR STAFF

REVIEW PROCESS: Accelerated / Full

APPLICATION STATUS: NEW APPLICATION, MAJOR AMENDMENT, RESUBMISSION

APPLICATION FOR: DISSERTATION, TEACHING, RESEARCH & PUBLICATION

ATTENDANCE AT HEALTH & SAFETY BRIEFING: YES / NO / NA

INCLUSION OF RISK ASSESSMENT FORM: YES / NO / NA

NOTES ON THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY ETHICS COMMITTEE.

- *All decisions of the committee are based on the application form and reviewers comments ONLY. Forms should be as detailed and clear as possible. Verbal discussions are not considered as part of the application or review process.*
- *The review process strictly adheres to the University of Chester Research Governance Handbook and the BPS Code of Ethics.*
- *The decision of the committee is final. If you are a UG, PGT or PGR student you should discuss the decision of the committee with your supervisor. If you are a member of staff you may contact the chair of the committee for further clarification.*

Before completing the form researchers are expected to familiarise themselves with the regulatory codes and codes of conduct and ethics relevant to their areas of research, including those of relevant professional organisations and ensure that research which they propose is designed to comply with such codes.

Department of Psychology Ethical Approval for Research: Procedural Guidelines.

University of Chester Research Governance Handbook

http://ganymede2.chester.ac.uk/view.php?title_id=522471

BPS Code of Ethics

http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/Public%20files/bps_code_of_ethics_2009.pdf

BPS Code of Human Research Ethics

http://www.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/code_of_human_research_ethics.pdf

BPS Guidelines for Internet-mediated Research

<http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/Public%20files/inf206-guidelines-for-internet-mediated-research.pdf>

BPS Research Guidelines and Policy Documents

<http://www.bps.org.uk/publications/policy-and-guidelines/research-guidelines-policy-documents/research-guidelines-poli>

Any queries email: psychology_ethics@chester.ac.uk

CHECK LIST.

Please complete the form below indicating attached materials. Prior to submission supervisors must confirm that they have reviewed the application by completing the supervisors column.

| <i>Notes: Students to indicate where information is found, supervisor to confirm by ticking green column</i> | Supervisor confirmatio | Information sheet | Letter | Email | Email info. page | Consent Form | PowerPoint | N/A |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------------------------|
| Brief details about the purpose of the study | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Contact details for further information | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Explanation of how and why participant has been chosen | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Notification that materials/interviews are not diagnostic tools/therapy or used for staff review/development purposes | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Explanation participation is voluntary | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Details of any incentives or compensation | N/A | | | | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Details of how consent will be obtained | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| If research is observational, consent to being observed | N/A | | | | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Details of procedure so participants are informed about what to expect | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Details of time commitments expected | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Details of any stimuli used | N/A | | | | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Explanation of right to withdraw and right to withdraw procedure | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Option for omitting questions participant does not wish to answer | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Procedure regarding partially completed questionnaires or interviews | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| With interviews, information regarding time limit for withdrawal | N/A | | | | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Details of any advantages and benefits of taking part | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Details of any disadvantages and risks of taking part | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Information that data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, those data will not be identifiable as theirs | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Debriefing details | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Dissemination information | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |
| Further information (relevant literature; support networks etc) | x | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | | | |



Supervisor Signature:

Date: 23/2/17

ETHICS COMMITTEE DATE:

CHAIRS COMMENTS:

- ☐ **Read and address all reviewers comments**

ACCEPTABLE

- ☐ **Action: You may now commence with data collection subject to approval from any relevant external agencies.**

DATA COLLECTION IS NOT PERMISSABLE UNDER THESE CONDITIONS

- ☐ **ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO SUBMISSION OF AMENDMENT FORM**
- ☐ **Acceptable subject to conditions listed by chair. Discuss conditions highlighted with supervisor and submit ethics application amendment form direct to office.**
- ☐ **Acceptable subject to conditions listed by chair: Submit ethics application amendment form direct to office.**

ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS LISTED BY CHAIR:

- ☐ **Action: Resubmit application for full review ensuring you have completed section B**

REVISE AND RESUBMIT:

- ☐ **Action: Resubmit application for full review ensuring you have completed section B**

SIGNATURE:

Appendix C. Ethics Amendment



University of
Chester

**UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER, DEPARTMENT OF
PSYCHOLOGY
APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL
AMENDMENT FORM**

A) Applicant and personnel

Applicant: STEPHEN ADAMS

Project title: HOPE AND COPE AS FACTORS IN STUDENT ADJUSTMENT,
EXPERIENCE AND WELLBEING

Applicant status: ☐ Staff → Go to Section B ☐ PGR ☐ Undergraduate ☒ Postgraduate taught

Supervisor: DR MICHELLE TYTHERLEIGH

B) Declaration

1. ☒ I have submitted an application for ethical approval to the Department of Psychology Ethics Committee and I am required to make the following amendments to my application.
List the recommendations of the committee. *NEEDS A LETTER FROM HEAD OF FOUNDATION SCHOOL, SUPPORTING ACCESS TO STUDENTS AS PARTICIPANTS, ON HEADED PAPER*
Describe how you have addressed these requirements. *A COPY OF THE LETTER IS ATTACHED.*
2. ☐ I have submitted an application for ethical approval to the Department of Psychology Ethics Committee that was approved on *Click here to enter a date.*
I wish the committee to consider the following amendments I would like to make to the research plan (attach the original approved application form) *Click here to enter text.*

☐ I am a member of staff. **Signed:** _____ **Date:** *Click here to enter a date.*

Print the amendment form on BLUE PAPER and submit to the Dept. Office

☒ I am an UG/PGT/PGR student. I have discussed any amendments with my project supervisor.
Print the amendment form on BLUE PAPER and submit to the Dept. Office

have discussed the recommendations of the committee with the applicant and I am satisfied they have met the stated requirements./I support the amendments to the research plan. (delete as appropriate)

☒ Yes Sign and date the form ☐ No Comments: *Click here to enter text.*

M Tytherleigh

Signed:

(Supervisor) Date: 28/03/2017

Signed:

(Lead Applicant) Date: 28/03/2017

Supervisor comments:

COMMITTEE COMMENTS:

iii **ACCEPTABLE:** You may now commence with data collection subject to approval from any relevant external agencies.

DATA COLLECTION IS NOT PERMISSABLE UNDER THESE CONDITIONS

i1 ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO SUBMISSION OF FURTHER AMENDMENT FORM.

i1 Acceptable subject to conditions listed by chair. Discuss conditions highlighted with supervisor and submit ethics application amendment form direct to office.

i1 Acceptable subject to conditions listed by chair: Submit ethics application amendment form direct to office.

Signed: _____

Date: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

Appendix D. Study Information and Questionnaires

STUDY INFORMATION: Student Adjustment, Experience and Wellbeing

What is the purpose of the study?

You are invited to take part in a research study, designed to explore what helps Foundation School students adjust to university life. This research is a questionnaire study, carried out by myself, Stephen Adams, as part of my MSc (Conversion) Psychology dissertation.

Taking part in this study will allow you to voice your experience of coming to university as a Foundation School student at Chester, including some of the thinking and coping strategies you may have used. The results will then be analysed to help us better see how different people's attitudes, behaviours and coping skills impact on their adjustment to university and how we might better enable our students flourish. As such, your participation in this study will make a very important contribution towards this aim, as well as contributing to a very important area of research that will help, both, you and future students adapt to university life in a positive way.

Do I have to take part and what happens if I change my mind?

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand what the study will involve and what you will be required to do. Please, therefore, take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please, also, ask if anything is unclear, or you would like more information.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time up until submission of the completed questionnaire, and without giving any reason for doing so. Also, if you do chose not to participate, or withdraw partway through, as no personally identifiable data will be asked of you, you will not be left at any disadvantage from doing so.

If you have any questions, my name is Steve and you can contact me, in the first instance, via 1523682@chester.ac.uk. Alternatively, my supervisor, Dr. Michelle Tytherleigh, can be contacted via m.tytherleigh@chester.ac.uk.

What will I have to do if I agree to take part?

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete the attached 15 minute questionnaire. As you can see, the first part of the questionnaire will ask you some background questions about yourself. In particular, your age, gender, average time it takes you to travel into university, and if you are an international or a home student. This is then be followed by some questions obtained from standardized questionnaires, about how you cope with different situations and your levels of general wellbeing.

As part of the first section, the questionnaire also asks you to provide your student ID No. The reason for this is to enable us to track whether you remain as an undergraduate student at Chester following completion of your foundation degree. However, you do not have to provide this information and can chose to leave this option blank. Apart from your student ID, you will not be asked for any other personally identifiable information.

The questionnaire is also not a diagnostic instrument. The questions you will be asked have been used in previous empirical research, and with students like yourself. There are no wrong or right answers; just a right answer for you and, as such, your open and honest

response is appreciated. Also, if you feel uncomfortable with answering any of the questions, then remember that your participation in this study must be voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. In this case, please destroy the unused/incomplete questionnaire. Moreover, whilst it will help our research if you are able to provide an answer to all the questions, you can select a 'prefer not to answer' option. Once you have returned the completed questionnaire, however, this option for withdrawal will cease.

Will my participation in the study be confidential?

All responses to the questionnaire will be anonymised for reporting purposes and handled in a strictly confidential way. The data will only be used for the purposes of the research, and by myself and my supervisor only. It will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act and University Research Policies and, once the analysis is complete, will be destroyed after a five year period.

How do I give informed consent?

Completion and submission of the questionnaire will be taken as your informed consent.

Who may I contact for further information if I experience any adverse effects?

It is not expected that participating in this study will create any adverse effects, or put you at risk in any way. However, if you are affected by any topics raised by the questions you are asked, then the following sources of support are available to you:

As a student at the University of Chester, please contact:

Student Welfare: Tel: 01244 511550; or by email at student.welfare@chester.ac.uk.
<http://www.chester.ac.uk/campus-life/support-for-students/counselling>

Outside of the university, please contact:

Your GP

The Samaritans: 01244 377999.

Mind Info Line: information on all aspects of mental distress.

www.mind.org.uk

Many thanks for reading this information and, if you are happy to participate in the study, you are now ready to complete the attached questionnaire. A box has also been made available to return your completed questionnaire to in the Foundation Degree Office. Please return all completed questionnaires by [insert deadline].

Thanks, Steve

Student Adjustment, Experience and Wellbeing

Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say ☐

Age (in years) :

Student ID Number (optional):

International Student ☐ UK Student ☐ Prefer not to say ☐

Approximate time (in hours) it takes me to travel to the university:

Less than 30 minutes ☐ 30 minutes to 1 hour ☐ More than 1 hour ☐

This first section of the questionnaire is designed to look at your ways of thinking and approach to different situations.

Please read each item carefully, and then using the 1-9 scale below, select the number that best describes YOU and put it in the blank space provided. If you prefer not to answer, please select this option.

- 1. = Definitely False
- 2. = Mostly False
- 3. = Somewhat False
- 4. = Slightly False
- 5. = Slightly True
- 6. = Somewhat True
- 7. = Mostly True
- 8. = Definitely True
- 9 = Prefer not to answer

In general:

- 1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
- 2. I energetically pursue my goals.
- 3. I feel tired most of the time.
- 4. There are lots of ways around any problem.

5. I am easily downed in an argument.
6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me.
7. I worry about my health.
8. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
10. I've been pretty successful in life.
11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

This second section is designed to look at your ways of coping. Each item says something about a particular way of coping, and how much/how frequently you've been doing this since starting at university. Please don't answer on the basis of whether this strategy has been working or not—just whether or not you've been doing it. Please, also, try to rate each item separately in your mind from the others and make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can

Please respond by putting the number in the blank provided. If you prefer not to answer, please select this option.

- 1 = I haven't been doing this at all
- 2 = I've been doing this a little bit
- 3 = I've been doing this a medium amount
- 4 = I've been doing this a lot
- 5 = Prefer not to answer.

1. I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things.
2. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.
3. I've been saying to myself "this isn't real".
4. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better.
5. I've been getting emotional support from others.
6. I've been giving up trying to deal with it.
7. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.
8. I've been refusing to believe that it has happened.
9. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.
10. I've been getting help and advice from other people.
11. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it.
12. I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
13. I've been criticizing myself.

14. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do.
15. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.
16. I've been giving up the attempt to cope.
17. I've been looking for something good in what is happening.
18. I've been making jokes about it.
19. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.
20. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.
21. I've been expressing my negative feelings.
22. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.
23. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.
24. I've been learning to live with it.
25. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.
26. I've been blaming myself for things that happened.
27. I've been praying or meditating.
28. I've been making fun of the situation.

This third section is designed to measures your levels of wellbeing.

Below are 8 statements with which you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1–7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by indicating that response for each statement in the blank provided. If you prefer not to answer choose 0.

- 7 – Strongly agree
- 6 – Agree
- 5 – Slightly agree
- 4 – Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 – Slightly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 0 – Prefer not to answer

1. _____ I lead a purposeful and meaningful life
2. _____ My social relationships are supportive and rewarding
3. _____ I am engaged and interested in my daily activities
4. _____ I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others
5. _____ I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me
6. _____ I am a good person and live a good life
7. _____ I am optimistic about my future
8. _____ People respect me.

This fourth section is designed to look at how you feel you have adapted to university.

The following statements describe some usual university experiences. Please read each one and select the number which best represents how closely the statement

applies to you, on a sliding scale from 1-9, where 1 = Applies very closely to me; 5 = Neutral; and 9 = Does not apply to me at all. Please select 10 if you would Prefer not to answer, and leave blank if the question is not appropriate to your situation (e.g., if you do not live in student accommodation).

1. ___ Fits in well with university environment
2. ___ Feels tense or nervous
3. ___ Keeps up-to-date with academic work
4. ___ Is meeting people and making friends
5. ___ Is definite about reasons for being in university
6. ___ Finds academic work difficult
7. ___ Feels blue and moody
8. ___ Is very involved with university social activities
9. ___ Is adjusting well to university
10. ___ Does not function well during assessments
11. ___ Feels tired a lot lately
12. ___ Being independent has not been easy
13. ___ Is satisfied with their level of academic performance
14. ___ Has informal contact with tutors and lecturers
15. ___ Is pleased with their decision to go to university
16. ___ Is pleased about their decision to attend this university
17. ___ Does not work as hard as he or she should
18. ___ Has several close social ties
19. ___ Has well-defined academic goals
20. ___ Is not able to control emotions well lately
21. ___ Does not feel smart enough for course work
22. ___ Is frequently homesick
23. ___ Considers a university degree important
24. ___ Appetite is good
25. ___ Does not use study time efficiently
26. ___ Enjoys living in a student accommodation
27. ___ Enjoys writing papers for courses
28. ___ Has a lot of headaches
29. ___ Is not motivated to study
30. ___ Is satisfied with extracurricular activities
31. ___ Has thought about seeking psychological help recently*
32. ___ Doubts value of a university degree
33. ___ Gets along well with room or hall-mates
34. ___ Would prefer to be at another university
35. ___ Gained or lost a lot of weight lately
36. ___ Has adequate social skills
37. ___ Gets angry too easily lately
38. ___ Has trouble concentrating when studying
39. ___ Is not sleeping well
40. ___ Does not do well academically, considering their effort
41. ___ Has difficulty feeling at ease with others at university
42. ___ Attends classes regularly

43. ____ Sometimes thinking gets muddled too easily
44. ____ Is satisfied with social participation
45. ____ Expects to finish an undergraduate degree
46. ____ Does not mix well with opposite sex
47. ____ Worries a lot about university expenses
48. ____ Enjoys academic work
49. ____ Feels lonely a lot
50. ____ Has trouble getting started on homework
51. ____ Has good control over their life situation at university
52. ____ Is satisfied with program of modules
53. ____ Feels in good health
54. ____ Feels different from others in undesirable ways
55. ____ Would rather be home than studying
56. ____ Most interests are not related to course work
57. ____ Is thinking about transferring to another university
58. ____ Thinks a lot about dropping out of university permanently
59. ____ Is thinking about taking time off from university
60. ____ Has good friends to talk about problems with
61. ____ Has trouble coping with university stress
62. ____ Is satisfied with social life
63. ____ Is satisfied with academic situation
64. ____ Feel confident they will be able to deal satisfactorily with their future challenges at university.

Finally, at this point in time and on a scale from 1 (very committed) to 3 (neutral) to 5 (not very committed), how committed are you towards:

1. ____ Completing your foundation year?
2. ____ Progressing to your next level of study at Chester?
3. ____ Applying to study for an undergraduate degree at a different university?

Thank you. You have now completed all of the questions on this questionnaire. If you are happy to submit your answers, please return your completed questionnaire to me or to the return box situated in the Foundation School Administrator's Office by 19th May. Please also detach and read the Debrief sheet; this also applies even if you have decided not to submit your completed questionnaire.

Appendix E

SACQ Subscales TOTAL CRONBACH .706

Three original survey questions were deleted on request of Head of Foundation School:

- 36 Is satisfied with variety of courses Academic Adjustment
- 43 Is satisfied with quality of courses Academic Adjustment
- 62 Is satisfied with professors Academic Adjustment

ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT - CRONBACH .805**Motivation**

- 5 Is definite about reasons for being in university
- 19 Has well-defined academic goals
- 23 Considers a university degree important
- 32 Doubts value of a university degree R
- 48 Enjoys academic work
- 56 Most interests are not related to course work R

Application

- 3 Keeps up-to-date with academic work
- 17 Does not work as hard as he or she should R
- 29 Is not motivated to study R
- 42 Attends classes regularly

Performance

- 6 Finds academic work difficult R
- 10 Does not function well during assessments R
- 13 Is satisfied with their level of academic performance
- 21 Does not feel smart enough for course work R
- 25 Does not use study time efficiently R
- 27 Enjoys writing papers for courses
- 38 Has trouble concentrating when studying R
- 40 Does not do well academically, considering their effort R
- 50 Has trouble getting started on homework R

Academic Environment

- 52 Is satisfied with program of modules
- 64 Is satisfied with academic situation

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT - CRONBACH .831**General**

- 1 Fits in well with college environment
- 8 Is very involved with college social activities

- 9 Is adjusting well to university
- 18 Has several close social ties
- 36 Has adequate social skills
- 44 Is satisfied with social participation
- 63 Is satisfied with social life

Other People

- 4 Is meeting people and making friends
- 14 Has informal contact with tutors and lecturers
- 33 Gets along well with room or hall-mates
- 41 Has difficulty feeling at ease with others at university R
- 46 Does not mix well with opposite sex R
- 54 Feels different from others in undesirable ways R
- 60 Has good friends to talk about problems with

Nostalgia

- 22 Is frequently homesick R
- 49 Feels lonely a lot R
- 55 Would rather be home than studying R

Social Environment

- 16 Is pleased about decision to attend this university
- 26 Enjoys living in a student accommodation
- 30 Is satisfied with extracurricular activities

PERSONAL-EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT –CRONBACH .768**Psychological**

- 2 Feels tense or nervous R
- 7 Feels blue and moody R
- 12 Being independent has not been easy R
- 20 Is not able to control emotions well lately R
- 31 Has thought about seeking psychological help recently* R
- 37 Gets angry too easily lately R
- 43 Sometimes thinking gets muddled too easily R
- 47 Worries a lot about college expenses R
- 61 Has trouble coping with university stress R

Physical

- 11 Feels tired a lot lately R
- 24 Appetite is good
- 28 Has a lot of headaches R
- 35 Gained or lost a lot of weight lately R
- 39 Is not sleeping well R
- 53 Feels in good health

ATTACHMENT TO UNI – CRONBACH .876

- 1. I feel that I fit in well as part of the college environment.
- 4. I am meeting as many people, and making as many friends as I would like at college.
- 26 Enjoys living in a student accommodation
- 42. I am having difficulty feeling at ease with other people at college. R
- 56. I feel I am very different from other students at college in ways that I don't like. R
- 57. On balance, I would rather be home than here. R
- 65. I am quite satisfied with my social life at college.

General

- 15 Is pleased with decision to go to university
- 58 Thinks a lot about dropping out of university permanently R
- 59 Is thinking about taking time off from university R

This College

- 16 Is pleased about their decision to attend this university
- 34 Would prefer to be at another university R
- 45 Expects to finish an undergraduate degree
- 57 Is thinking about transferring to another university R

Appendix F

Email: **Student Adjustment, Experience and Wellbeing Study**

Dear Foundation School Student

During one of your upcoming lectures, I will be giving you information about my research study, which is designed to explore methods that help students adjust to university life. This research is a questionnaire study, carried out by myself, Stephen Adams, as part of my MSc (Conversion) Psychology dissertation.

As a current Foundation School student at Chester, you will be invited to take part in this study, which will allow you to voice your experience of coming to university at Chester, including some of the thinking and coping strategies you may have used. You will do this by completing a questionnaire.

Completing the questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to do and the results will then be analysed to help me better see how different people's attitudes, behaviours and coping skills impact on their adjustment to university, to explore ways that better enable students to flourish. As such, your participation in this study will make a very important contribution towards this aim, as well as contributing to a very important area of research that may help, both, you and future students adapt to university life in a positive way.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time up until submission of the completed questionnaire, and without giving any reason for doing so. Also, if you do choose not to participate, or withdraw part-way through, as no personally identifiable data will be asked of you, you will not be left at any disadvantage from doing so.

I will give you further information next week in the study skills session, and be available to answer any queries you may have. Also, if you have any questions now, in the first instance you can contact me on 1523682@chester.ac.uk. Alternatively, my supervisor, Dr. Michelle Tytherleigh, can be contacted via m.tytherleigh@chester.ac.uk.

Many thanks,

Stephen Adams

Appendix G

Debrief Page

Once again, thank you for taking part in this research. As stated in the information sheet, if you have decided to return your completed questionnaire, your data will be used to explore relationships between your general attitudes, approach to coping, wellbeing and adjustment to university, with the potential to help us identify better ways to help foundation degree students, like you, adjust to university. As such, your data and the time you have given towards completing this questionnaire, is very important to us.

If you would like any further information, please contact me via 1523682@chester.ac.uk in the first instance or, alternatively, my supervisor, Dr. Michelle Tytherleigh. She can be contacted via m.tytherleigh@chester.ac.uk.

Whilst it is not anticipated that this study will have caused you any distress, if you feel you have been affected by any topics raised by these questions and you are a student at the University of Chester, please contact Student Welfare on 01244 511550, or email them at student.welfare@chester.ac.uk.

As a University of Chester student, you may also find the following useful:
<http://www.chester.ac.uk/campus-life/support-for-students/counselling>

Outside of the university, you can also contact your GP, as well as the following sources:

The Samaritans: 01244 377999.

Mind Info Line: information on all aspects of mental distress.
www.mind.org.uk

Once again, thank you for taking part!

Appendix H. Histograms

